

February 14, 2007: Everett Second Floor Statement Opposing Democrat Iraq Resolution

Floor Statement

Rep. Terry Everett (R-AL)

Surge in Iraq Resolution H.Con.Res. 63

February 14, 2007

Mr. Speaker, I thank my ranking member, a combat veteran from Vietnam and a great American.

Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor today to pay tribute to my ranking member and chairman, and to the service of all men and women who are serving in the Armed Forces and those who have prior service, many who serve in this distinguished body. And thank goodness. I say thank goodness, because I find that in this body we have too few people who have ever worn a uniform, but we have an awful lot of opinions about how to wear a uniform.

We have heard from many of these Members on both sides of the aisle. Some served in Vietnam, some in the first gulf war, and some in the war that we are currently fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. They cite their firsthand experience in serving our country as justification for why they believe we cannot afford to lose the war or why we should not support the Commander in Chief's reinforcement proposal or, in some cases, why we should bring the troops home immediately and cut off funding.

Mr. Speaker, I respect every Member in this Chamber who has served our country with honor and distinction. Each of them brings a different perspective to the debate. However, today I would like to bring another perspective to the debate, and it is that of Army pilot Keith Yoakum from Coffee Springs, Alabama, in my district. Chief Warrant Officer Yoakum was killed February 2 in Iraq when the Apache helicopter he was flying was forced to land during combat operations in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

While his death is a tragedy, his family is taking comfort in the fact that Chief Warrant Officer Yoakum was doing what he loved, defending the country that he loved. This Army aviator was proud of what he was doing in Iraq, and told his father that there was no other place he would rather be until the war was over.

Much of his pride came from his ability to protect our guys on the ground using his Apache helicopter who were executing the dangerous missions of ridding the neighborhoods of those who wanted to kill his fellow troops as well as innocent Iraqis. However, equally as important was Keith Yoakum's belief that he was making a difference in this fight to make this world a better place for his daughters to live.

Chief Warrant Officer Yoakum is not alone in his belief. The hundreds of soldiers that I have visited with share his view of this war. Whether it was during a solemn sendoff of our brave men and women or an emotional welcome home ceremony, the soldiers I talk to believe in this mission and that we must prevail in this war.

They recognize the dire consequences if we don't succeed in Iraq. If we withdraw prematurely, the terrorists will have an unchecked sanctuary from which they can launch attacks to kill more innocent Americans, similar to what existed in Afghanistan prior to our toppling the Taliban regime in Operation Enduring Freedom. To abandon our fight against the terrorists is to have failed to learn the lessons of 9/11 and to revert to a policy that allowed two decades of escalating violence. That policy resulted in the death of thousands of Americans, as was so well documented by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. Saxton).

Mr. Speaker, it is imperative that we defeat this enemy, whose sole desire is to kill Americans anywhere, in any way they can. Today the theater is Iraq. But if we retreat from this war, as those on the other side of the aisle have advocated, then we will fight them in the cities and in the towns. Either way, this war will be fought.

Mr. Speaker, I have a guest essay from my hometown newspaper, the Dothan Eagle, from a war veteran by the name of Wayne Wood, and I would like this complete essay entered into the Record after I speak. But first I want to quote a couple of things from it. This is, as I said, from a former combat veteran, Wayne Wood.

``As I watch the current debate over the war in Iraq, I remember sitting in the day room at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, with my buddies and watching the collapse of South Vietnam and Saigon in 1975. I was thinking of, and I know my buddies were thinking of, all the guys we knew who'd gone over to fight for the Vietnamese who didn't come back. We cursed the ARVN soldiers as cowards because they would not stand and fight for their country. We were angry that the sacrifice of these good--no, great--Americans was in vain.

``It was only years later that I learned, to my dismay, that it wasn't the ARVN who betrayed my fellow soldiers' blood, it was their very own elected representatives in Congress who voted to cut funding for the defense of the Republic of South Vietnam.

``We are being told the Iraqi situation is unwinnable. We were told that we had lost the war in Vietnam.

``After Tet in 1968, Walter Cronkite, 'the most trusted man in America,' went on the air and said so. Americans said, 'If Walter says we've lost, it must be so.'

``Now, our media, and others, some in this body, ``tell us the same thing. We are being told of how hopeless the situation is in Iraq. What about the American people? What are the American people supposed to think?

``But the picture I got from former students who have served in Iraq tells another story. They are frustrated that the good things that are happening in Iraq aren't being shown, that the people only see the bad. There's a genuine fear that they won't be allowed to finish the job. Their sacrifice would be in vain.

``From a distance, the situation as shown looks grim. But as a soldier who has seen war up close, I know war is a grim business. I remember the words of Marine General Julian Smith, speaking of the Battle of Tarawa in World War II: `We were losing, until we won.'"

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Wood has a number of other examples here, and that is the reason I will include the letter for the Record.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues, and I urge my colleagues on the other side, if we are not going to cut funding from this war, then bring up Congressman Sam Johnson's amendment that says we will neither cut nor restrict funding for this war. I ask my colleagues to stand with Chief Warrant Officer Yoakum and the thousands of other soldiers who believe in their mission and want to see it through to completion, and vote against this resolution. It can only do harm to our troops and bring aid and comfort to the terrorists.